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Shock wave and bubble: the untruth about the Cheonan

'proof' that the Cheonan was sunk by North Korea has been thoroughly discredited.

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Only a small coterie in the USA and South Korea know for sure what really happened to the South Korean warship. But, unreported in the Western media, the 'proof' that the Cheonan was sunk by North Korea has been thoroughly discredited.

As is often the case following a negotiated outcome, both sides claimed victory. After the final text on the sinking of the South Korean corvette was agreed by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council on 9th July, the Whitehouse issued a statement which asserted:

> Today's UN Security Council Presidential statement condemns the attack by North Korea on the Cheonan and warns North Korea that the international community will not tolerate such aggressive behavior against the Republic of Korea. The unanimous statement, reflecting the shared view of the 5 members of the Six-Party Talks, constitutes an endorsement of the findings of the Joint Investigative Group that established North Korea's responsibility for the attack.

But the UNSC Presidential statement did no such thing. It did not condemn 'the attack by North Korea' or 'warn North Korea', because it did not name the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) as the culprit. And it did not endorse the findings of the Joint Investigative Group which was appointed by the government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The wording of the statement on this matter was much more cautious:

> In view of the findings of the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group led by the ROK with the participation of five nations, which concluded that the DPRK was responsible for sinking the Cheonan, the Security Council expresses its deep concern.

Following which, the UNSC statement added:

> The Security Council takes note of the responses from other relevant parties, including from the DPRK, which has stated that it had nothing to do with the incident...

> The Security Council welcomes the restraint shown by the ROK and stresses the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in northeast Asia as a whole.

In contrast to the US government's claims, the editors of the *New York Times* made no attempt to portray the position reached at the UNSC as any kind of success for United States diplomacy. Rather, the *NYT*'s editorial on 9th July, entitled 'Security Council Blinks', ranted with frustration:

> 'Lowest common denominator' is too often the standard at the United Nations. Even then, the Security Council's new statement on the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan is absurdly, dangerously lame…
>
> Forty-six South Korean sailors died last March when the warship sank in disputed waters. Seoul quickly accused North Korea of torpedoing the ship but showed admirable restraint, inviting in an international team to investigate. The team did its work and agreed that a North Korean ship was responsible. South Korea produced a torpedo propeller with North Korean markings.

Contrary to the assertion by the *New York Times* editorial writers, it is not the case that, following the sinking, the ROK 'quickly accused North Korea of torpedoing the ship'. Although South Korea's current right wing government is pro-US and very hostile to the DPRK, the initial ROK official position was that it was unlikely that North Korea was involved- the reason being that no evidence could be obtained to implicate the DPRK, and the information that was available was in contradiction to the theory that North Korean forces had sunk the warship. As the South Korean newspaper *The Hankyoreh* reported on 1st April:

> In the immediate wake of the incident, the Cheong Wa Dae (the presidential office in South Korea or Blue House) and the military detailed the chance of North Korean involvement as slight. Following a security-related ministerial meeting presided over by President Lee Myung-bak just after the accident took place on Friday night, Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Eun-hye was circumspect, saying, "At present, we are not clear about the question of a North Korean connection." In a National Assembly briefing Saturday, Lee Ki-sik, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff intelligence operations office, said, "No North Korean warships have been detected, and there is no possibility of their approaching the waters where the accident took place." Additionally, the military has stressed on multiple occasions that it has picked up no "unusual trends" in North Korean military movements while monitoring…
>
> As recently as Tuesday, Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Park Sun-kyu said, "As of now, nothing has emerged indicating that North Korea was involved."

Even by April 20th, as the British *Daily Mail* newspaper acknowleged:

> Seoul has not openly blamed Pyongyang for the sinking of the Cheonan, one of

> South Korea's worst naval disasters.

Investigation or cover up?

As for the action of the ROK authorities in, as claimed by the *New York Times* and other Western media outlets, "inviting in an international team to investigate", this assertion is highly misleading. In fact the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group (JIG) was appointed by the South Korean government, and apart from a very small number of foreign participants was drawn overwhelmingly from the South Korean military and defence establishment. As a footnote to an article in the *Asia-Pacific Journal* records:

> Despite its name – the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group – the absolute majority of its members, 65 out of 74, work for the [South Korean] Ministry of National Defense or MND-related think tanks and institutes. One of its two heads, Pak Chŏng-I, was a three star general at the time of the investigation, and was subsequently promoted to a four star status after the release of the report.

The foreign participants in the JIG were selected from Western countries- the USA, Britain, Canada, and Australia, with the partial inclusion of Sweden. Although its description as an 'international team' conveys the implication of objectivity and impartiality, it included no Russians or Chinese, nor even any French or Germans.

On May 6th, Reuters reported the claim of a senior South Korean government official that the investigators had decided that the Cheonan had been sunk by a torpedo- the evidence for this was the discovery of traces of materials consistent with a German-made torpedo in the wreckage of the ship:

> Investigators probing the deadly sinking of a South Korean navy ship in March near the North have concluded that a torpedo was the source of an explosion that destroyed the vessel, a news report said on Friday.
>
> The team of South Korean and foreign investigators found traces of explosives used in torpedoes on several parts of the sunken ship as well as pieces of composite metal used in such weapons, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said quoting a senior government official…
>
> The metallic debris and chemical residue appear to be consistent with a type of torpedo made in Germany, indicating the North may have been trying to disguise its involvement by avoiding arms made by allies China and Russia, Yonhap quoted the official as saying.
>
> North Korea has denied involvement and accused South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's government of trying to use the incident for political gains ahead of local elections in June.

How the North Koreans could have obtained a German torpedo, or manufactured one which would leave traces consistent with those of a German torpedo, was apparently not remarked on by the ROK official.

At a press conference on May 20th, it was announced that the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group had completed its interim investigation. The group's report, which has been variously described as being 250 or 400 pages long, was not made available to the public- for security reasons, of course- and only a five page summary was presented.

Smoking gun, rusting torpedo

The JIG report's conclusion was that the Cheonan was sunk by "a shock wave and bubble effect generated by an underwater explosion… caused by a torpedo made in North Korea", and parts of the rear section of a torpedo which had supposedly been dredged up from the sea bed on May 15th, in the vicinity of the disaster, were exhibited at a press confererence as the definitive 'smoking gun'.

For proof that it was of DPRK origin, the South Korean officials pointed firstly to the symbol 'number 1' in Korean, written clearly in marker pen on one of the components, in ink which had survived both the huge explosion which had blown the warship in half and the heavy corrosion which had degraded the remains of the torpedo; and secondly to a diagram of a torpedo which they claimed was from a North Korean weapons catalogue that had come into their possession. The dredged up torpedo parts, according to the JIG report summary, "perfectly match the schematics of the CHT-02D torpedo included in introductory brochures provided to foreign countries by North Korea for export purposes."

There was no mention at the press conference or in the JIG report summary of any Germanic characteristics, either in the samples taken from the wreck of the Cheonan, or in the rusting torpedo components which were put on display.

In an article in a local Canadian newspaper, the *Vancouver Sun* on June 18th, Jonathan Manthorpe remarked on the JIG summary:

> The problems with this summary fall into two main categories. One is the process by which the investigation was undertaken and the roles of the people involved. Some statements suggest the international experts played little or no assertive role in the inquiry and simply reviewed what the South Korean team members put before them.
>
> The second is the feeble nature of the evidence that has been made public.
>
> The summary statement actually refers to two reports. The first four pages assess physical evidence from the retrieved sections of the Cheonan, which broke in two as it sank.
>
> This assessment included experts from South Korea, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden.
>
> It is this section that concludes that the Cheonan was broken in half and sunk as the result of a torpedo exploding under its hull. Analysis of some fragments found on the seabed a few days before publication of the report indicates, says the report, that it was a North Korean-manufactured torpedo.
>
> For some reason which is not explained, the Swedish representative on this team refused to sign the statement. Indeed, it has been hard to follow up on the report

> because most of the international experts involved remain anonymous.
>
> So what role the Swedish action played in the forming, late in the day, of another international team on May 4 is hard to judge. This team is called the Multinational Combined Intelligence Task Force and includes most of the countries fighting under the United Nations flag against North Korea in the 1950-53 war on the peninsula. That is: the U.S., Australia, Canada and Britain.
>
> It is the one-page summary of this team's assessment that concludes there is no other credible explanation for the sinking than a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine.

Following the publication of the JIG report's summary and the press conference at which the remains of the torpedo with "North Korean markings" were exhibited alongside a life-size reproduction, several metres long, of the torpedo diagram from the North Korean export brochure, the US and the South Korean authorities felt that they were now in a position to achieve a significant advance in their objective of increasingly isolating the DPRK. For the USA, there was also another problem which the 'proven' allegation against North Korea would help to resolve- the threat by the Japanese government to remove the US base on the island of Okinawa, the biggest United States military emplacement in the Eastern hemisphere.

Intransigence

The *New York Times* editorial of July 9th continued:

> Afterward [ie, after the JIG's summary was issued], Seoul and Washington both condemned Pyongyang's actions and vowed to obtain a similarly tough Security Council statement. But all in all, South Korea continues to exercise restraint.
>
> China, which has veto power on the Council, insisted on watering down the statement. The Obama administration could not change its mind…
>
> The statement "underscored the importance of preventing further such attacks or hostilities against" South Korea or in the region. But given the weasel wording about blame, it is hard to imagine that Pyongyang will listen.

The reaction of DPRK officials to the Security Council Presidential Statement was jubilant. According to RFE/RL, which headlined its report 'UN Condemns South Korea Ship Sinking, Avoids Blaming North Korea':

> Sin Son-ho, North Korea's permanent representative to the UN, called the council's action a success for his country.
>
> "It is our great diplomatic victory," he said. "From the beginning of the incident we have made our position very clear that this incident has nothing to do with us."

The major victor in this diplomatic battle, however, was the People's Republic of China; which has succeeded- despite repeated predictions that it would succumb to US pressure and concede that North Korea was responsible for the explosion which sunk the Cheonan- not only in maintaining the independence of its own foreign policy from that of the USA, but in ensuring that the text which was eventually adopted by the Security Council on this issue was closer to the Chinese position than that of the US. Furthermore, as the RFE/RL article noted:

> In a bow to North Korea's ally China, which is a permanent member of the [Security] council and thus has a veto power, the group adopted a presidential statement instead of the resolution that was requested by South Korea and Japan.
>
> The presidential statement is a weaker form of censure than a resolution.

The second key victor at the UNSC was Russia. In tune with their country's current effort to achieve a rapprochement with the Russian authorities, the *New York Times* and RFE/RL (which is a US government-owned international broadcasting service) named only China, not Russia, as the impediment to the USA's attempt to get the Security Council to find North Korea 'guilty' of sinking the Cheonan. But the Russians, while taking a low profile on the issue- most likely order to avoid embarassment to the Obama administration- have been quietly insistent that they would not sign up to a resolution which blamed the DPRK for the incident.

Why have China and Russia been so intransigent in refusing to blame North Korea for the sinking of the South Korean warship? The Russians have no particular pro-North Korean agenda, and the Chinese, though frequently described as the DPRK's ally, do not always give diplomatic support to the actions of the North Korean leadership. In May 2009 after the DPRK exploded a nuclear device, China immediately issued a strong statement of opposition to the North Korean nuclear test; both China and Russia subsequently voted for a UNSC resolution which unequivocally condemned the DPRK action and agreed limited sanctions against North Korea.

This is in marked contrast to the role of China and Russia in the wake of the Cheonan disaster.

Related to this, why, despite all its public statements and those of other Western and pro-Western governments, did the USA eventually 'bow to China' at the UN Security Council; and why, despite the sinking of one of its military vessels and the killing of 46 of its sailors, supposedly in a deliberate act by an unfriendly neighbour, has South Korea behaved with such 'restraint' over the matter, as acknowleged by almost all and sundry?

The most straightforward explanation is that the Chinese and Russian leaderships genuinely and very strongly suspect that North Korea did not sink the Cheonan, and that those 'in the know' within the US and South Korean administrations know for a fact that North Korea did not sink the Cheonan.

The Russian conclusion

After May 20th, the North Korean government demanded to have access to the full JIG

report and to send a team of investigators to the Republic of Korea to examine the physical evidence, and of course the ROK authorities refused to allow this. However, when the Russians made a similar request, the South Koreans felt they had no alternative but to agree. While the conclusion of the Russian team, which was comprised of submarine and torpedo experts, has not been reported by the Western media, it did surface in the South Korean press. *The Hankyoreh* reported on 10th July under the headline 'Government protests Russia's Conflicting Cheonan findings':

> It came to light Friday that the South Korean government summoned the Russian Ambassador to South Korea and expressed strenuous objections over the Russian government's failure to provide notification of the findings of its independent team that investigated the Cheonan sinking. The team was dispatched to South Korea around one month ago and concluded that it was unable to view the "No. 1 torpedo" as being the cause of the sinking.
>
> According to military and foreign affairs supports connected to Russia, the Russian government provided notification of its independent investigation results only to the Chinese and U.S. governments last week, and South Korea only found out about the content indirectly through those two countries.
>
> Following this, 1st Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Shin Kak-soo summoned Russian Ambassador to South Korea Konstantin Vnukov to the Foreign Ministry on July 4 to express "astonishment" at Russia's investigation findings because the findings were a complete contradiction to the South Korean government's announcement. They also expressed severe dismay about the fact that Russian notified only the U.S. and China about the findings, while leaving South Korea out of the communication loop.
>
> Foreign affairs sources reported that Shin used forceful and diplomatically irregular language to denounce Russia's behavior, calling it "unfriendly conduct that violates trust," "bewildering," and "disappointing." It was also reported to Shin proposed additional discussions with Russia during the meeting, and that the South Korean government subsequently provided additional information to the Russian government.
>
> "Was it not the South Korean government that provided assistance to the Russian investigation, saying that they would be objective?" asked a former senior official in foreign affairs and national security, adding that the Russian investigation results "raise fundamental doubts about the [South Korean] government's announcement of its Cheonan investigation findings."
>
> It was reported that while the Russian investigation team did conclude that the Cheonan was not sunk by a North Korean bubble jet torpedo, it did not present any definitive conclusions about the direct cause, suggesting several possible scenarios such as a secondary mine explosion following a problem with the Cheonan during its maneuvers. Analysts are interpreting this as being due to the fact that the Russian team, made up of submersible and torpedo experts, focused its examination on the question of whether the sinking resulted from a strike by the "No. 1 torpedo."

For the Cheonan to have been broken in two by a torpedo in the way described by the South

Korean JIG group, by "a shock wave and bubble effect", only a bubble jet torpedo could have been used in the 'attack'. *The Hankyoreh* article continued:

> "The Russian investigation team's primary interest was in whether North Korea, which had been unable to produce its own torpedoes until 1995, suddenly was able to attack the Cheonan with a state-of-the-art bubble jet torpedo," said a South Korean diplomatic source.
>
> Indeed, the technology for bubble jet torpedoes, which are capable of splitting a vessel in two through the expansion and contraction of a bubble resulting from a powerful explosion, is possessed only by the U.S. and a small number of other countries, and has only been successful to date in experiments on stationary ships rather than actual fighting. The joint civilian-military investigation team also acknowledged in its June 29 briefing to media groups that North Korea was the first to have succeeded in using a bubble jet torpedo in the field.

So, the Russian investigators determined that the Cheonan was not sunk by a North Korean bubble jet torpedo; and instead of making a public show of this conclusion, Putin and Medvedev had decided that they would quietly release the findings to the US and Chinese authorities- a decision taken in all probability because Russia is trying to avoid taking actions which would embarrass the present US administration and endanger the chances of improved diplomatic relations with the United States. Despite its angry bluster, the South Korean government got off very lightly as a result of this decision by the Russian leadership.

Catalogue of deceit

But what about the diagram from the North Korean weapons catalogue, the 'perfect match' which was produced at the press conference? This piece of 'evidence' fell apart in two stages. Firstly, several journalists, bloggers and other observers who compared the diagram to the remains of the 'number 1 torpedo' pointed out that the size, shape and position of the components in the diagram did not correspond to the corroded pieces which had been dredged up from the ocean floor.

When the ROK authorities eventually admitted this, they made the excuse that they had, by mistake, brought along the wrong diagram to the press conference. It also transpired that the catalogue itself had no physical existence- what the South Korean officials later claimed to possess was information recorded on a CD. The *Chosun Ibo* reported on June 30th:

> In a blow to conclusions that are already under attack from leftwing politicians and activists, a team of experts that investigated the sinking of the Navy corvette Cheonan have admitted showing a diagram of the wrong North Korean torpedo when they presented their findings at a press conference on May 20.
>
> When queried by journalists about discrepancies between the CHT-02D torpedo that attacked the Cheonan and the one depicted in the diagram, investigators said Tuesday that the pictured torpedo was of the model PT-97W and that the error was due to "a mix-up by a staff member while preparing for the presentation."

> A South Korean military spokesman said the error was discovered after the press conference and a presentation of the evidence in front of the UN Security Council featured the correct diagram.
>
> Investigators said they obtained information on the torpedo "from North Korean publications and CDs," adding they secured the materials through "separate routes." The diagram was on a CD.

In South Korea, people who disagree with the official account of the Cheonan disaster are being prosecuted by the ROK government and armed forces for expressing their dissident views, and the USA, although it is usually keen to be seen as an exponent of human rights, has made no protests or expressions of concern at this infringement of freedom of expression. Nevertheless, a large section of opinion in South Korea remains unconvinced; the skeptics include representatives of the Democratic Party (the main opposition party in South Korea), NGOs, bloggers, journalists and a considerable number of the general public.

Thus, unlike in the Western countries where the impression has been successfully created that the case against North Korea has been proven beyond doubt, the question of what happened to the Cheonan is a matter of great controversy; and the daily paper *The Hankyoreh* (the fourth largest newspaper in the ROK) has published a series of articles which expose many serious flaws and contradictions in the official version of events. Of these, several have been published on the English section of *The Hankyoreh*'s website, including 'Questions linger 100 days after the Cheonan sinking', 'Marines testified Cheonan water column was lightning' and 'Scientific debate around Cheonan findings heats up'.

Scientific destruction

As remarked in the latter report, scientists have attacked the JIG team's conclusions as incompatible with the physical evidence; two North American-based academics, Seunghun Lee (Department of Physics, University of Virginia) and J.J. Suh (SAIS, Johns Hopkins University) wrote an article for the *Asia-Pacific Journal* summarising some of the inconsistencies. The authors accused the JIG of fabricating data and lying about the conduct of the investigation. Some excerpts from the article:

> Our results show that the "critical evidence" presented by the JIG does not support its conclusion that the Cheonan's sinking was caused by the alleged DPRK's torpedo. On the contrary, its contradictory data raises the suspicion that it fabricated the data.
>
> First, the JIG failed to produce conclusive, or at least convincing beyond reasonable doubt, evidence of an outside explosion. While the JIG argues in its report that the pattern of the ship's deformation and severance is consistent with the damage caused by a bubble effect from an outside explosion, its claim is not supported by the evidence. A JIG simulation showing how a bubble might be formed by an underwater explosion, and how it might sever the Cheonan, was not completed by the time the JIG released its report, as it acknowledged at the [South Korean] Parliament's Special Committee on the Cheonan on May 24. The simulation that was shown at the conference only shows a bubble being formed and hitting the bottom of the ship, deforming the ship and making a small

> rupture in the hull. Nowhere does this simulation show the Choenan being completely severed in the middle by the bubble, as stated in the JIG report.
>
> Not only did the JIG's press conference simulation fail to show that the bubble effect could have cut the Cheonan, that simulation is not consistent with the pattern of the ship's damage. If the bottom of the ship was hit by a bubble, it should show a spherical concave deformation resembling the shape of a bubble, as the JIG's own simulation suggests… but it does not. The bottom of the front part of the ship is pushed up in an angular shape… more consistent with a collision with a hard object.
>
> Equally important, if a bubble jet effect was produced by an outside explosion of 250kg of explosives, as the JIG argues, that explosion should have produced an immediate pre-bubble shock wave whose strength would have been at least 5000 psi (pounds per square inch) when it hit the bottom of the Cheonan. The bottom and ruptured surface of the ship betray no sign of such a large shock… the internal instruments and parts remain intact in their original place; and none of the crew members suffered the kind of injuries expected of such a shock. Given that an underwater explosion produces both a bubble effect and a shock wave and the latter is usually about 6 to 10 times as destructive as the former, the ship's and the crew's condition is not consistent with the damage expected of an outside explosion.
>
> The JIG's so-called first finding, therefore, is a mere allegation that is groundless and contradicted by the JIG's own evidence and at least one analysis of underwater explosions in the military literature.
>
> [The JIG's] claim that the "recovered" torpedo exploded outside the Cheonan has no scientific basis. It has presented two pieces of evidence to support its claim: that white compounds – "adsorbed materials" in the JIG's report (we analyzed the Korean-language JIG report) – found on the torpedo match those found on the surfaces of the Cheonan ship; and that the compounds resulted from an explosion. We concur with the JIG on the first, but believe that the second has no basis.

Following a rather complex technical explanation, the academics continued:

> …when the media reported our experimental results and the inconsistencies between the AM-3 and the other two samples, the ROK ministry of defense responded that the crystalline Al signal found in the AM-3 sample was due to an experimental mistake, which we believe is a plain lie.

In respect of the Korean inscription 'number 1' in marker pen ink on a component of the dredged-up torpedo, Seunghun Lee and J.J. Suh observed:

> Third, although the JIG presented the torpedo parts recovered from the area of presumed explosion as "critical evidence" that tied the explosion to North Korea, the "critical evidence" has a serious inconsistency that casts doubt on the

> integrity of the evidence. The outer surface of the torpedo propulsion unit that was found was greatly corroded, presumably because the coat of paint that would have protected the metal had been burnt off during the explosion. The paint burn-off and resulting metal corrosion are consistent with a high heat explosion commonly found in bombs and torpedoes. And yet the blue ink marking of Hangul – "1bŏn" in Korean – remains intact despite the fact that ink has a lower boiling point, typically around 150 degrees in Celsius, than paint does – typically 350 degrees Celsius – and thus the ink marking should have burnt away just like the outer paint. Our simple estimates suggest that the torpedo would have been subjected to heat of at least 350 degrees Celsius and quite likely over 1000 degrees, high enough to burn the paint and thus the ink as well. This inconsistency – the high heat tolerant paint was burnt but the low heat tolerant ink was not – cannot be explained and casts serious doubt on the integrity of the torpedo as "critical evidence."

These findings were picked up by the international science journal *Nature*, which covered them on 8th July (the article was updated on 14th July). Although the scientific case against the JIG's conclusion was damning, the writer of the *Nature* article strove to achieve some balance, by quoting another US expert:

> James Schoff, an expert in Asian regional security mechanisms who heads Asia-Pacific studies at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Washington DC, says, "Aside from the science, it is consistent with North Korea's behaviour in the past. It fits the goal of the conservatives [within the (North Korean) government], which is to try to raise awareness of a security threat."
>
> This doesn't, however, rule out the possibility that North Korea did sink the ship but that South Korea nonetheless fabricated data to make a stronger case to the United Nations, admits Schoff. It's possible, for example, that they added the ink, he says. "It wouldn't surprise me if they added it to make it more convincing. But I have no doubts personally that the conclusion [of the JIG report] is correct."

So, the science should be disregarded because sinking a South Korean ship is the kind of thing that it is assumed the DPRK would get up to; and even if the South Korean authorities fabricated the evidence, one should have no doubts that the North Koreans are guilty.

Regime change in Japan

But at least *Nature* covered the story. Despite the famed 'freedom of the press' of the Western world, the scientific refutation of the JIG conclusion has not, so far, been reported in any major English language news publication- and neither have the rest of the facts which de-bunk the case against North Korea.

It is for this reason that, despite its failure at the UN Security Council, the United States has achieved something of a success in terms of public opinion- reinforcing the view of the DPRK as a country with an irrational, dangerous leadership- hence bolstering support for the USA's military presence in the region. In Japan particularly, the the untruth about the Cheonan has had a very useful result in terms of US power and influence. Not only has the United States

been enabled to keep its huge military base on the island of Okinawa, it has also got rid of the Japanese leader who dared to defy the USA on this key strategic issue. As ABC news reported on 2nd June:

> Japan's Prime Minister Yukio Yatoyama resigned today following a bitter battle over the relocation of a U.S. air base on Okinawa that has dominated domestic headlines for months.
>
> The ruling Democratic Party of Japan scrambled to find a new leader after Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama resigned Wednesday, apologizing for failing to keep a campaign promise to move a contentious U.S. military base, as his party desperately tried to boost its chances in elections next month. Kan, who has a clean and defiant image, emerged a likely successor.
>
> Hatoyama sided with residents who have long protested the noise and pollution of the Futenma air base, occupied since the end of World War II…
>
> Last week, shortly following South Korea's claim that North Korea torpedoed one of their ships in neighboring water, Tokyo agreed to allow the base to remain on Okinawa.
>
> The about face by the prime minister sent his approval ratings plummeting in Japan…
>
> The last few months of the prime minister's term have been mired in controversy as he fought for Futenma to be moved off the island of Okinawa.

But what did happen to the South Korean warship? Only a small coterie in South Korea and the US know with any certainty. After the Cold War ended, some hitherto secret information was released by US officials, allowing those who were interested among the public to realise that they had been lied to by the US authorities on certain key strategic matters. The justification for the previous deceit was that fooling the public was necessary in order to win the Cold War.

One day, maybe far in the future when the present strategic rivalry in the Eastern Hemisphere is a matter of merely historical interest, some key documents will possibly be de-classified, and a future generation will discover the truth about the Cheonan.

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